

2004 Legislative Session Progress Report to the Community

From Rep. Mike Armstrong - 12th Legislative District

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Dear Friends and Neighbors

With this 2004 session update, I want to tell you about progress we made. Thanks so much for all your emails, letters, calls and visits. It's an honor to serve and represent you.

As a result of this year's work in Olympia, folks back home can look forward to more job opportunities, no *new* taxes or cuts in current state programs, property tax relief and opportunities to save money on health insurance for seniors and new funding for local colleges and universities.

My goal is to create solutions and solve problems to improve our lives and our communities for the better. You can help me identify the challenges that face us. I'm always interested in your opinions, questions and concerns. Please keep your communications coming. It helps me do a better job for you.

Sincerely,



Mike Armstrong

Your input helps me do a better job serving you!

Thanks to everyone who took the time to make the trip over to see me and participate in the legislative process this session! Some of you spent time discussing issues with me, others testified in committees, but all of you made me feel a bit closer to home during your visits.



Chelan County Sheriff Mike Harum, who visited me in Olympia and testified on local legislation, the Saul Gallegos Peace Officer Survival Act of 2004.

Our Apple Blossom Court, with me and my legislative seatmates, on their annual visit to Olympia to meet with legislators and see how the process works.



Wenatchee Valley College president Dr. Jack Becherer when he and several students visited me in Olympia to discuss higher education and local priorities.

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Rep. Mike Armstrong - 12th Legislative District

Creating and protecting jobs

We passed a law that will save jobs at home and encourage investment in our local communities by giving aluminum smelters much-needed tax relief. This solution is just what Alcoa said it needed to re-open the Wenatchee plant and continue offering good-paying jobs to more than 400 of our own residents. Smelters all over the state will benefit, and add to our economic recovery by protecting and creating family-wage jobs. All three of your legislative representatives supported this critical measure. I want to thank my colleagues, Representative Cary Condotta and Senator Linda Evans Parlette, for joining me in co-sponsoring and helping to pass this bill. Our joint efforts made a huge difference in getting workable legislation through the process and signed into law.

Your money at work

By working together to create the best compromise possible, we passed a state budget that funds more opportunities in higher education, gives classified public school employees a much-needed salary increase and spends nearly \$13 million to support nursing homes and home health-care workers. Just as important, it doesn't raise taxes, doesn't cut core programs and leaves more than \$300 million in reserves for unexpected expenses. Of course, all existing state programs—and any growth in the number of Washingtonians served by those programs—have been planned for and will continue to be funded in the 2004 supplemental budget.

Helping local health care clinics continue serve the needy

The 2004 budget provides community clinics – like our community health center for Chelan and Douglas counties in Wenatchee – with the additional resources they so desperately need to continue serving low-income patients who often have nowhere else to turn. Now Columbia Valley Community Health, and centers like it, will see a 25 percent increase in direct state grant support. I and other lawmakers approved \$2.5 million to pay for this in the state's Health Services Account. The clinic's medical director shared with me the need for

these funds. He said they're critical to strengthening our region's health care safety net. I agree this new funding should help maintain a vital community service, and keep our area's health care providers in business for awhile longer. I will continue to work for adequate funding of this important service. It's especially important in light of the Legislature's inability to pass meaningful small group insurance reform this session. There is more work to do to give working families and small employers the option of affordable health insurance.

Helping educators, students and parents

Quality, basic K-12 education that provides opportunity to all children, empowers teachers and involves parents, is something I've always supported and will continue to fight for. The Legislature tackled several education bills this session and I'm happy to report we have a new law which will improve the Washington Assessment of Student Learning. The WASL is still a work in progress, however, and I have concerns about the 10th Grade Certificate of Mastery being a graduation requirement. That being said, this new law gives students the opportunity to "re-test" in areas where they fail to meet standards. Lawmakers really came together in a problem-solving way to achieve this compromise bill that I believe will give students, teachers and parents the tools they need to work together to "make the grade."

Investing in higher education for new opportunities

Wenatchee Valley College and Central Washington University are important local resources for students in our communities. More than \$3 million in new investment is coming our way to create more opportunities for families and students. This kind of investment highlights the value of our local community college and university. New funding in the state's 2004 budget for capital improvements gives \$1.5 million to the Wenatchee Higher Education Center, in partnership with Central Washington University, and \$1.6 million to Wenatchee Valley College for Anderson Hall.

Help for seniors with...

Property taxes

It is important that we do all we can to help seniors protect their homes. A new law increases the amount of money you can earn and still be eligible for property tax exemptions. If you're on a fixed income and have a disability, you should now get more relief from high property taxes. Seniors have been paying taxes all their lives and contributing to our communities' resources and well being. This is in addition to their personal sacrifices and contributions that make our cities and towns better places to live. I'll continue to fight for more, well deserved tax relief for our seniors. It's the fair and right thing to do.

Health care costs

I'm also pleased to tell seniors who have Medicare Supplement insurance that they'll once again be able to save hundreds of dollars a year—some say as much as \$300—off the cost of their premiums. This new law, in effect right now and in time for annual renewals, gives seniors back their discounts for various payment methods, including electronic fund transfers or annual installments, and for spouses. Seniors came up with the idea for the legislation, seniors lobbied for it and the state's largest senior organization, AARP Washington, endorses it. It's a great example of how the people we represent as legislators can make a difference in their lives and the lives of others throughout Washington.